

Message Text

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

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TAGS: MASS, MMOL, IN
SUBJECT: INDIAN ACQUISITION OF A DEEP PENETRATION STRIKE AIRCRAFT

REF: NEW DELHI A-36, FEB 24, 1978

1. THIS TELEGRAM SUMMARIZES A-36 POUCHED ON FEBRUARY 24,
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AN ANALYSIS BY THE AIR ATTACHES AND POL/MIL OFFICER OF
THE PROPOSED INDIAN ACQUISITION OF A DEEP PENETRATION
STRIKE AIRCRAFT (DPSA). THE PAPER EXAMINER NBMNALE URGED

BY INDIA'S MILITARY PLANNERS FOR OBTAINING A DPSA AND CONSIDERS WHAT POLITICAL FORCES MIGHT ALSO BE DRIVING THE QUESTION. FINALLY, THE EMBASSY PROPOSES A U.S. POLICY RESPONSE TO MINIMIZE THE ESCALATION OF ARMS IN THE SUBCONTINENT.

2. THE THREAT POSED BY PAKISTAN'S MIRAGE III/V FORCE IS THE PRINCIPAL ARGUMENT ADVANCED FOR INDIA'S ACQUIRING A DPSA. INDIAN PLANNERS PRESENT A WORST CASE SCENARIO IN WHICH THE SMALLER, BUT QUALITATIVELY SUPERIOR PAKISTANI AIRCRAFT WOULD GAIN CONTROL OF THE SKIES TO INDIA'S SERIOUS DISADVANTAGE. EVEN ACCEPTING THE STRONGEST ASSUMPTION CONCERNING THE NUMBER OF AIRCRAFT AVAILABLE TO PAKISTAN, WE STILL CONCLUDE THAT INDIA'S NUMERICAL AIR SUPERIORITY WOULD PREVAIL IN A CONFLICT. A DPSA IS FAR FROM NECESSARY FOR INDIA'S SURVIVAL. INDIAN STRATEGISTS ENVISION THE DPSA AS BEING USED IN BOTH OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE ROLES, ALTHOUGH LESS IS SAID PUBLICLY ABOUT THE FORMER.

3. THE THREAT HOSED BY CHINA IS OFFERED AS A SECONDARY JUSTIFICATION FOR INDIA'S ACQUIRING A DPSA. WHILE THE AIRCRAFT MIGHT BE USED TO ATTACK BASES IN TIBET, ITS USE FOR DEFENSIVE PURPOSES SEEMS MORE LIKELY IN A CONFLICT WITH CHINA.

4. MILITARY PLANNERS IN INDIA, AS IN OTHE COUNTRIES, ARGUE THAT BECAUSE OF LONG LEAD TIMES THEY MUST GO BEYOND PRESENT FORESEEABLE THREATS INFRASTRUCTURING FORCE LEVELS. IN ADDITION,

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THERE ARE IMPORTNT POLITICAL JUSTIFICATIONS URGED FOR THE DPSA. INDIA, A S A "GREAT NATION", CAN NOT, IT IS SAID, NEGLECT ITS MILITARY POWER. IN ADDITION, THE ACQUISITION OF A DPSA IS PROJECTED AS THE SOURCE FOR IMPORTANT INDUSTRIAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES. THE MILITARY AND NON-MILITARY JUSTIFICATIONS FOR THE DPSA COMBINE TO ENGENDER WIDESPREAD SUPPORT IN MILITARY AND CIVILIAN CIRCLES FOR AN INDIAN DPSA.

5. AT THEIR PRESENT LEVEL THE COMBINED INDIAN ARMED FORCES ARE SUPERIOR TO THOSE OF PAKISTAN, AND THE ACQUISITION OF A DPSA WOULD MERELY INCREASE THE INDIAN ADVANTAGE. IN SUCH A CASE, WE AGREE WITH EMBASSY ISLAMABAD THAT PAKISTAN WILL SEEK TO OBTAIN AN AIRCRAFT COMPARABLE TO THAT ACQUIRED BY INDIA. ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT NUCLEAR WEAPONS ARE NOT INTRODUCED INTO THE REGION, INDIA WOULD STILL RETAIN THE STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE. IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT THERE IS LITTLE CONCERN IN INDIA OVER THE LIKELIHOOD OF AN ESCALATION IN THE ARMS LEVEL IN THE SUBCONTINENT.

6. A COMPARISON OF THE DPSA LIKELY TO BE ACQUIRED BY INDIA AND THE MIRAVE V CURRENTLY IN THE PAKISTANI INVENTORY INDICATES THAT BOTH PLANES ARE OF COMPARABLE SOPHISTICATION. THE KEY

DIFFERENCE CONCERNS THE VARIOUS OPTIONS WITH WHICH THE PLANS
CAN BE OUTFITTED. THE EMBASSY DOES NOT BELIEVE THEREIS MUCH
CHANCE TO DISSUADE INDIA OR ITS POTENTIAL EUROPEAN SUPPLIERS FROM
PROCEEDING WITH THE DPSA PROJECT. GIVEN THE FACT THAT THE BASIC
AIRCRAFT IS NOT SIGNIFICANTLY SUPERIOR TO THAT NOW HELD BY
PAKISTAN, WE SUGGEST THAT WE NOT ATTEMPT TO PERSUADE INDIA TO
ABANDON THE PROJECT BUT RATHER TRY TO LIMIT THE INTRODUCTION OF
NEW MILITARY TECHNOLOGY VIA THE OPTIONS WITH WHICH THE
DPSA COULD BE FITTED.
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